

Is wellbeing and public policy on the same flight path as positive psychology?

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4TH BIENNIAL CONFERENCE OF THE NZ ASSOCIATION OF POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

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Positive Psychology in New Zealand

- ▶ Caring professions
- ▶ Positive education
- ▶ Positive organisations
- ▶ Positive leadership
- ▶ Positive parenting
- ▶ Focus on mental wellbeing



Wellbeing and public policy gets philosophical

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- ▶ Wellbeing ~ *good lives* for individuals (and groups)
- ▶ Welfarism ~ public policies should aim at wellbeing
- ▶ NZ Treasury: Living Standards Framework ~ public policies should aim at equitable and sustainable wellbeing

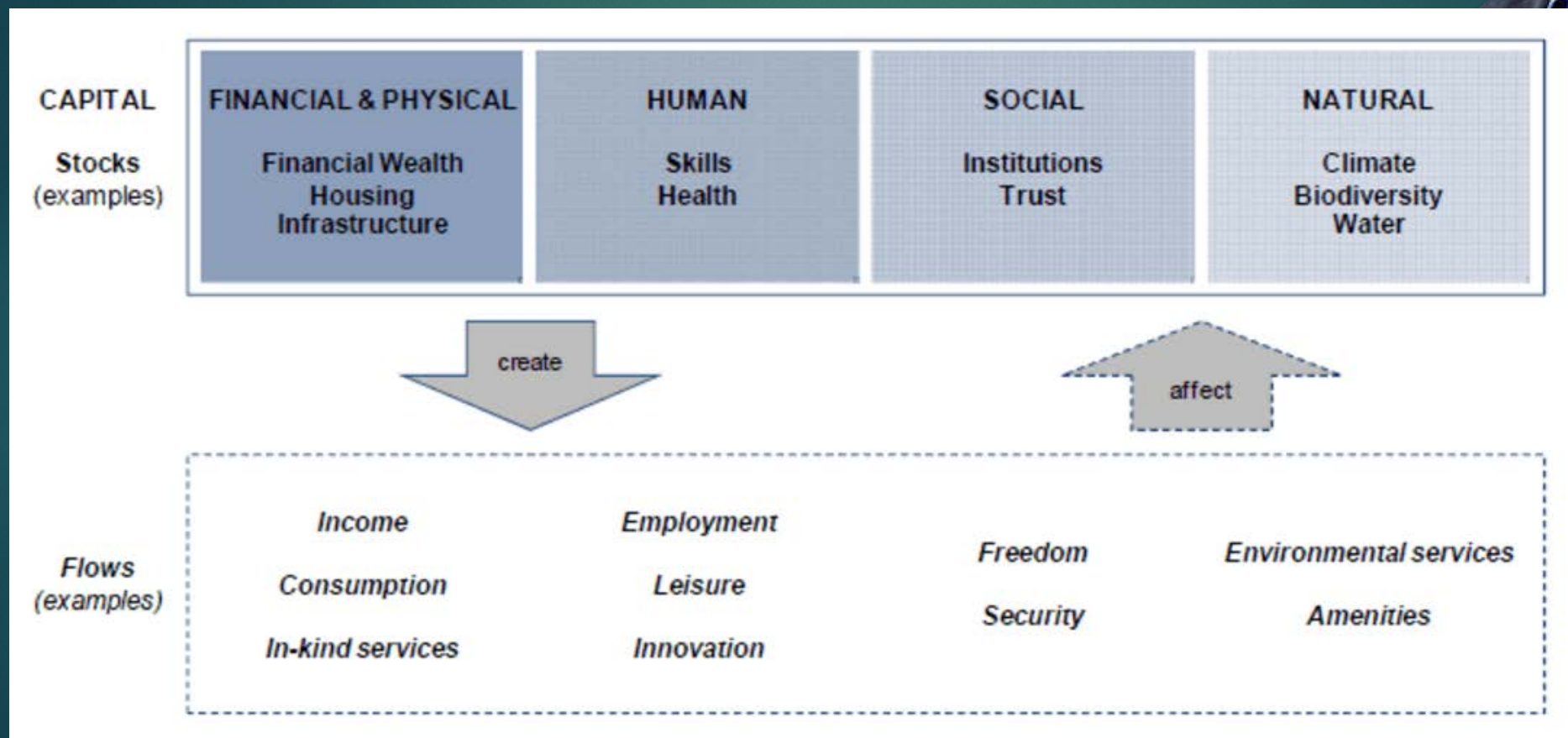
- ▶ But what is the *good life*?
 - ▶ Wealth, power, & longevity?
 - ▶ Health, safety, & freedom,?
 - ▶ Happiness, meaning, & respect?

Traditional first world and current
developing world foci

Emerging goals for policymakers

NZ Treasury's Living Standards Framework (Sen's Capabilities)

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These stocks and flows are probably *instrumental* prudential goods.

Where is mental wellbeing?

Subjective & mixed approaches

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Alex Michalos

Low objective
living conditions

High objective
living conditions

Low subjective
wellbeing



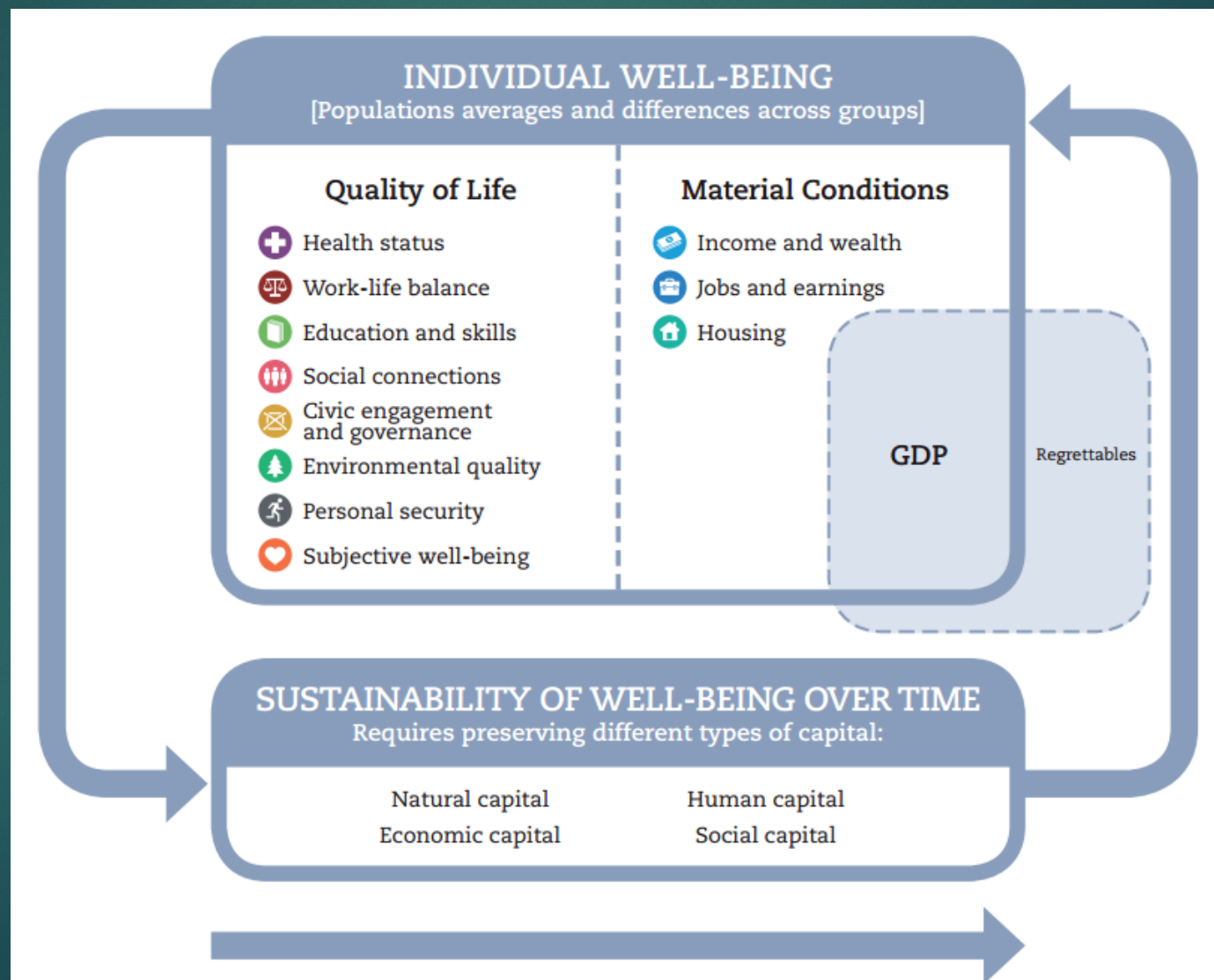
High subjective
wellbeing



OECD Better Life (dashboard)

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Includes
objective
and
subjective
measures
+
mental
wellbeing



What
about
cultural
factors?

What
about
religion?

Indicators Aotearoa New Zealand – Ngā Tūtohu Aotearoa

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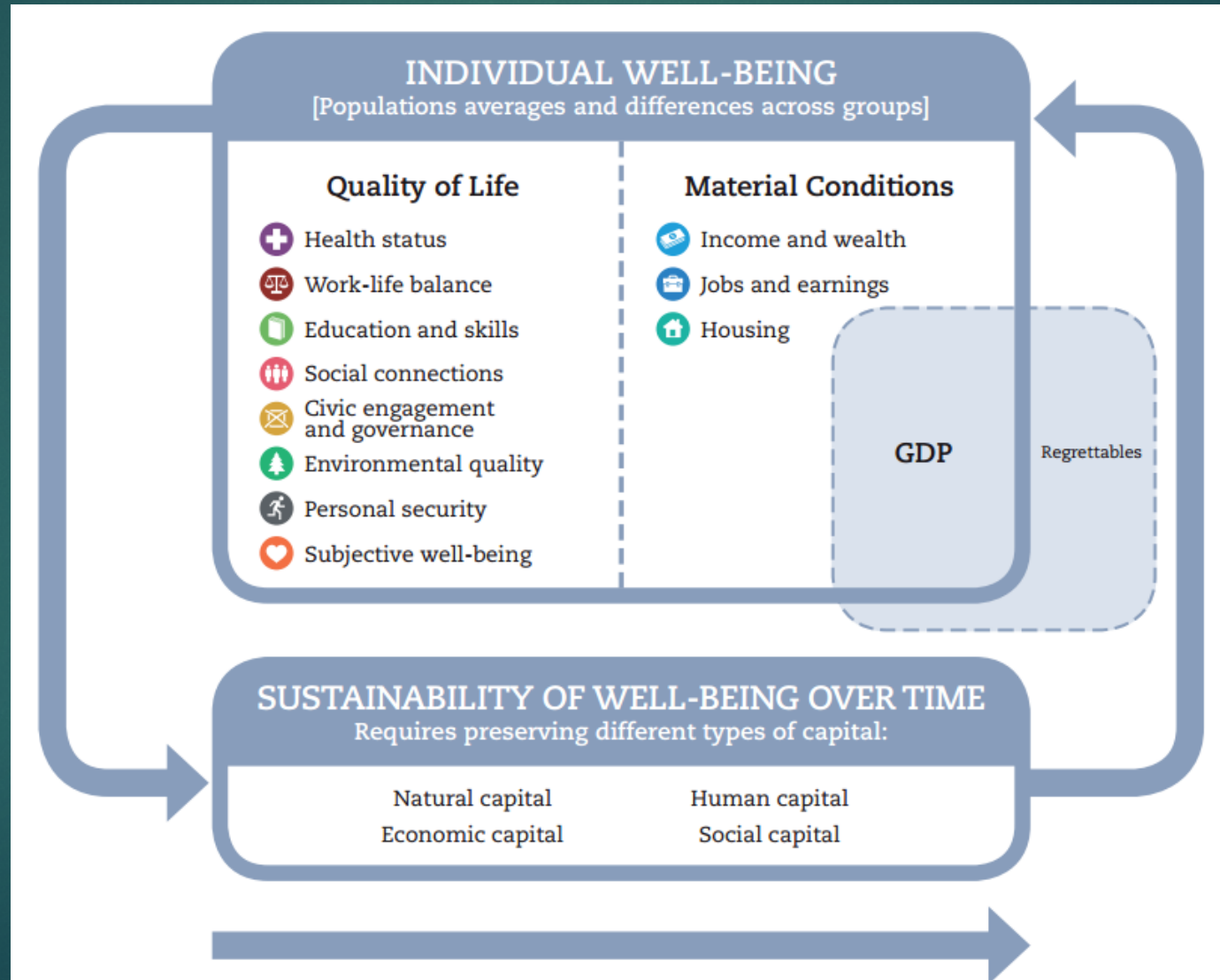
- ▶ What is important for your wellbeing, the wellbeing of your whānau, your hapū, your iwi?
- ▶ (He aha te mea nui mō te oranga o tō whānau, o tō hapū, o tō iwi hoki?)
- ▶ Currently in Phase 3 “Data expert input”, but it will still take your view on wellbeing
- ▶ <https://www.stats.govt.nz/consultations/indicators-aotearoa-new-zealand-nga-tutohu-aotearoa-consultation>



OECD Better Life (index/headline?)

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A good measure of national progress, but how to use for policy-making?

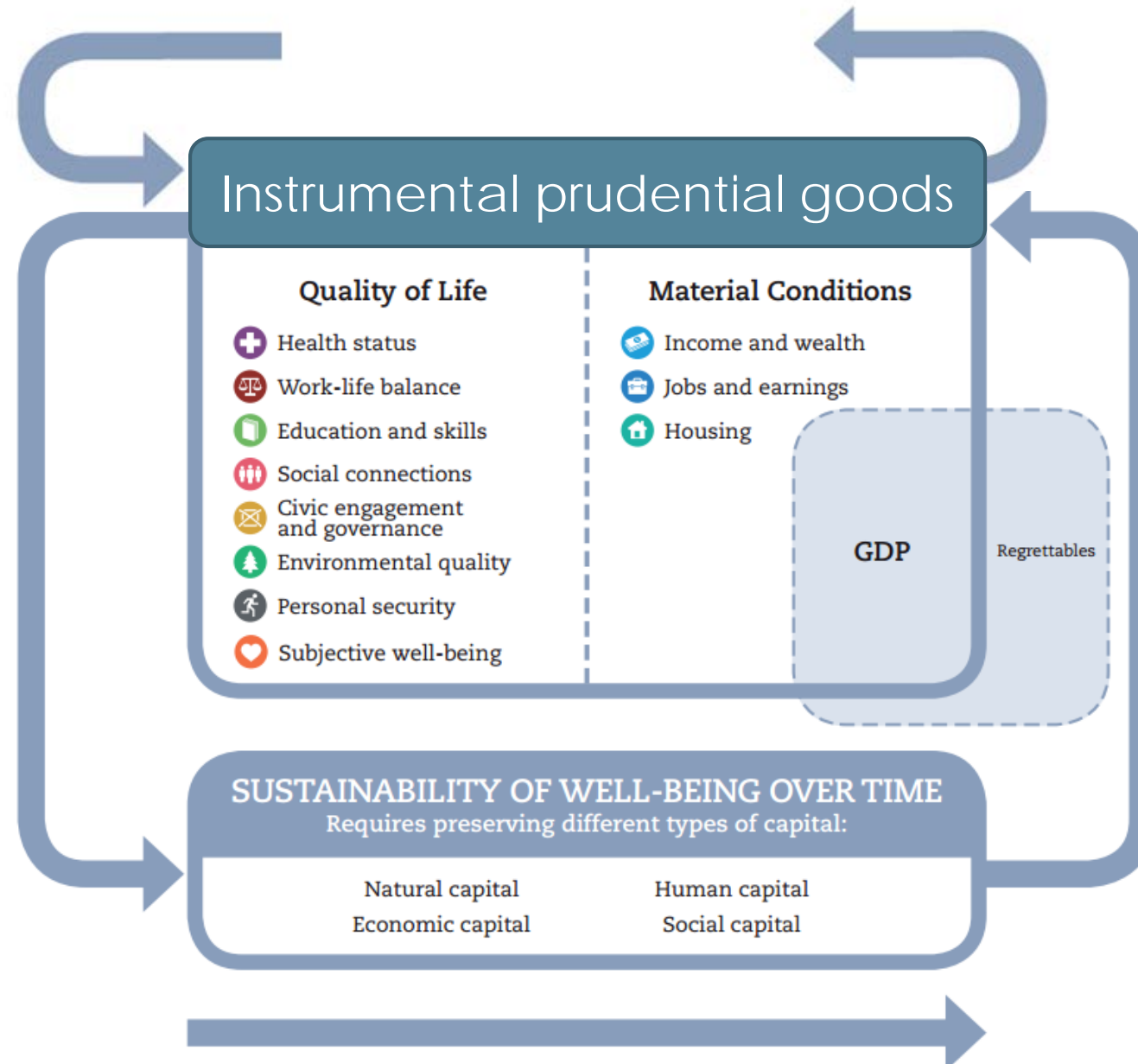


Too many non-fungible goods to effectively use cost benefit analysis

Solution?

Positive psychologists have argued for dashboards with many mental and subjective well-being measures

Well-being



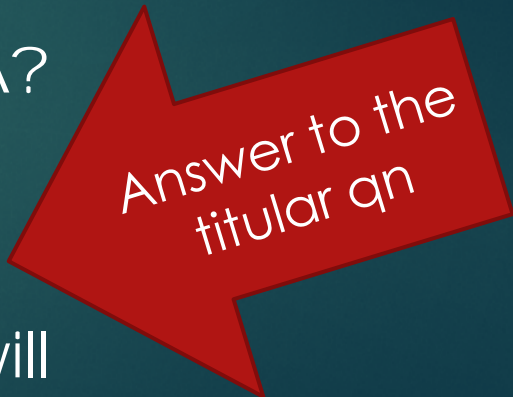
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“Well-being economists” are starting to argue for a single ultimate measure of well-being: **Life satisfaction**

Being precise about well-being has never been more important

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- ▶ What should the **ultimate measure of well-being** be for policy?
- ▶ Old school policymakers: Money
- ▶ Well-being economists: Life satisfaction
- ▶ Positive psychologists: Mental well-being index? PERMA?
- ▶ These flight paths are similar, but importantly different
- ▶ If life satisfaction is chosen, few positive psychologists will be involved in top-level policy



Answer to the
titular qn

So many important **interdisciplinary** questions

- ▶ Wellbeing of **who/what**?
- ▶ **One or many** ultimate prudential goods?
- ▶ Can the **goods change** over time?
- ▶ **Average, total**, lowest quintile?
- ▶ **Who** should **decide**?
- ▶ What are the **causes** of the ultimate prudential good/s?
- ▶ Can they be efficiently **measured**?
- ▶ Can **policies affect** the good or its causes?

We should work together!

Further reading (open access)

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- ▶ Weijers, Dan & Morrison, Philip (2018). Well-being and Public Policy: Can New Zealand be a Leading Light for the 'Well-being Approach'?, *Public Policy Quarterly*, 14(4): 3-12. https://www.victoria.ac.nz/_data/assets/pdf_file/0008/1713626/Weijers_Morrison.pdf
- ▶ Weijers, Dan & Mukherjee, Udayan (2016). Living Standards, Wellbeing, and Public Policy, *The New Zealand Treasury*, 1-32. Available from: <http://www.treasury.govt.nz/government/longterm/fiscalposition/2016/ltps-16-bg-lswpp.pdf>
- ▶ Weijers, Dan & Jarden, Aaron (2013). The Science of Happiness for Policymakers: An Overview, *Journal of Social Research and Policy*, 4(2): 21-40. https://sites.google.com/site/jrspone/content/JSRP_Vol4_Iss2_Weijers